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Editorial

Fürst, Silke ; Salerno, Sébastien

Abstract: We are pleased to introduce the first issue of 2021, which comprises many contributions from a wide range of research fields in communication and media studies, including digital communication, gender studies, media reception and effects, political communication, journalism research, and science communication. With authors from the universities of Zurich, Berne, and Fribourg, as well as from universities in Germany, Austria, Spain, Sweden, and Canada, this issue illustrates that SComS is a home for Swiss studies as well as international research. This is also highlighted by our advisory board, which was renewed in spring 2021. Its fourteen members are distinguished scholars with expertise in a wide range of research areas within communication and media studies. They also represent different Swiss language regions, neighboring countries of Switzerland, and other European countries (see more information on our website). With this issue, SComS has also renewed its editorial team and journal management. While Jolanta Drzewiecka and Silke Fürst are welcomed as new editors and Mike Meißner as new journal manager, SComS bids farewell to Sara Greco and Thomas Häussler, who served the editorial team for more than five years. Their engagement greatly contributed to SComS becoming a well-established open access journal within communication and media research.

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Editorial

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Dear SComS readers,

We are pleased to introduce the first issue of 2021, which comprises many contributions from a wide range of research fields in communication and media studies, including digital communication, gender studies, media reception and effects, political communication, journalism research, and science communication. With authors from the universities of Zurich, Berne, and Fribourg, as well as from universities in Germany, Austria, Spain, Sweden, and Canada, this issue illustrates that SComS is a home for Swiss studies as well as international research. This is also highlighted by our advisory board, which was renewed in spring 2021. Its fourteen members are distinguished scholars with expertise in a wide range of research areas within communication and media studies. They also represent different Swiss language regions, neighboring countries of Switzerland, and other European countries (see more information on our website).

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Environment (HOPE) of the University of Zurich for the good cooperation during the past years.

Recent, very positive developments of our journal are worth being highlighted. During the last year, the then journal manager Silke Fürst witnessed tremendous growth in submissions, leading to a total of 34 full papers submitted to our journal for the General Section alone. Some of these submissions did not comply with the basic rules of our submission guidelines and the scope of our journal or did not meet general standards of scientific quality, therefore resulting in 15 desk rejects. One submission was rejected because of plagiarism. All in all, 18 submissions went to peer review, of which four were rejected based on the recommendations by the reviewers. Six submissions were accepted, four of them published in this issue. The other eight submissions are still in review, most of them in the second review round.

The two Thematic Sections in 2020, *Financial Discourse* (Issue 1) and *The Dissolving Boundaries of Hybrid Journalism* (Issue 2), received an additional number of nine submissions, of which seven were accepted and published. We are very thankful to the guest editors for their engagement, to all authors who consider SComS as a venue for their work, and to all reviewers for their careful reviews and thoughtful comments.

The growth in submissions was accompanied by a significant increase in total downloads of articles, from nearly 5500 downloads in 2019 to around 10 500 downloaded articles in 2020. In addition to the downloads on the HOPE open access platform, SComS is also read in the printed edition created by Seismo Press.



The General Section of the current issue contains four contributions. It opens with an article by Dorothee Arlt which takes up the recent case of the Swiss popular initiative “Yes to a veil ban” and examines audiences’ perceptions of (hostile) media bias. The study is based on a standardized online survey conducted in March 2019 with 976 respondents from the German and French language regions in Switzerland. The results show that perceptions of media coverage on Islam and Muslims differ decisively among audience members. While about one-third of the population consider the Swiss media coverage as accurate, another one-third each think that the media overstate or understate certain threats and integration problems. Perceptions of media bias vary according to attitudes toward Islam and Muslims, political orientation, and personal contacts with Muslims. In contrast, media exposure had no direct effect on bias perceptions. Moreover, the study indicates that perceptions of media bias are a strong predictor of voting intentions and therefore deserve more attention in future research.

Thomas Zerback and Dominique S. Wirz apply appraisal theory and focus on political communication in social media. They investigated how message-inherent factors influence emoji reactions of Facebook users. The authors used a disproportionally stratified random sample of $N=600$ messages posted by German political parties between 2017 and 2018 and combined automatic and manual quantitative content analysis. Their analysis indicates that message-inherent factors indeed influence the use of emojis, with anger triggering more angry emoji reactions and sadness triggering more sadness emojis. Moreover, the authors conclude that “anger and sadness eliciting posts are shared more often than other posts on Facebook” (p.40). This could also explain “why negative news and hate speech spreads fast on social media” (p.40). The results also suggest that emotion-eliciting content and the use of emoji reactions vary between political parties, with the political party “Alternative for Germany”

(AfD) inducing the most emotionalized content and activity.

The following article connects the fields of audience studies, journalism research, and science communication. Nina Wicke and Monika Taddicken applied Wolling’s theory of subjective quality assessments (TSQA) and carried out a qualitative study with German media users. The authors conducted four group discussions with 26 participants, used excerpts from German public broadcasting as stimuli, and analyzed the material by means of qualitative content analysis. The study shows that media users have various expectations regarding the coverage and representation of science, including the media’s responsibility to prominently cover climate change and raise societal awareness about it. It turned out that the current coverage of climate change does not fulfill these expectations – it is often perceived as too low a quality and sensational. Given the gap between expectations and the evaluation of coverage, Wicke and Taddicken conclude that contextual, constructive, and more multifaceted coverage could “enable the re-awakening of interest in climate change” (p.62).

The last paper of the General Section also gives insight into users’ perspectives. Michael V. Reiss, Noemi Festic, Michael Latzer, and Tanja Rüedy combined qualitative interviews with a representative online survey of Swiss Internet users. Their comprehensive study was conducted between 2018 and 2019 and investigates the “subjective relevance that Internet users assign to algorithmic-selection applications in everyday life” (p.71). The authors distinguish five life domains, that is, political and social orientation, entertainment, commercial transactions, socializing, and health. Across these domains, algorithmic-selection applications are perceived to be of comparatively low relevance, while offline activities are considered as most important. However, “younger and more frequent Internet users assign greater relevance to various algorithmic-selection applications” (p.84). Overall, the findings contribute to understanding the social relevance of algorithmic selection and could

inform regulation of platforms and algorithmic selection.

The Thematic Section of this issue is dedicated to *Visibility in the Digital Age*. In their introductory text, guest editors Cornelia Brantner and Helena Stehle clarify the concept of (digital) visibility and invisibility and summarize the five research papers of this section. These papers shed light on issues of accessibility, representation, participation, diversity, and inequalities and examine science communication, algorithms, social media, locative media apps, free software, and television programs. While Claudia Wilhelm, Darryl A. Pieber, and Julia Metag contribute conceptual papers, Christine Linke and Elizabeth Prommer, as well as Dafne Calvo, add empirical studies that point out gender inequalities of visibility.

The guest editors Cornelia Brantner and Helena Stehle are part of the network *(In)Visibility in the Digital Age* (<https://in-visibility.net/>), which was funded and hosted by the Center for Advanced Internet Studies (CAIS). Workshops and discussions in this network led the guest editors to the idea of organizing a Thematic Section in SComS with papers that address questions raised in their discussions and contribute to this area of research. All studies in this Thematic Section were published online first and together were seen around 1300 times (abstract views) and downloaded more than 700 times during the first six months, which highlights the importance of advance online publications. In SComS, this publication format was introduced in 2020 and has already enhanced production processes, the pace of publishing, and the visibility of articles.

A book review and two conference reports complete the issue. Ulrich van der Heyden reviewed Ingo von Münch's book *Die Krise der Medien (The Media Crisis)*. The book sheds a critical light on German-language news media and addresses issues of news quality, political correctness and the diversity of opinions and voices in public discourse, the societal responsibility of the press, and the relationship between journalists and audiences. Ulrich van der Heyden considers this book a use-

ful contribution for reflecting on the role of media in democratic societies.

Silke Fürst reports on the DACH 21 preconference *Public Communication Science in Times of the Covid-19 Crisis*. Held online on April 7, 2021, the preconference was organized by the association *Öffentliche Medien- und Kommunikationswissenschaft*, which aims to establish, promote, and further develop the concept of public science in communication and media research. After an introductory talk, "What Is Public Science?" by Caroline Robertson-von Trotha, Beat Glogger and Matthias Egger outlined expectations of and from science in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. Then, three communication and media scholars from Germany, Austria, and Switzerland gave insights into their research projects on the Covid-19 coverage. Thorsten Quandt, Josef Trappel, and Linards Udris reported on how they communicated the findings of their projects to the public and the public responses they received. The following discussion emphasized the need for further exchange on issues of public communication science.

The DACH 21 conference took place from April 7 to 9, 2021, and was the first three-country conference on communication science, jointly organized by the German DGPK, the Austrian ÖGK, and the Swiss SACM. The online conference *#Communication #R)Evolution: Changing Communication in a Digital Society* was hosted by the Department of Communication and Media Research (IKMZ) at the University of Zurich. It was attended by more than 500 participants from 16 countries. The report by Philipp Bachmann highlights the keynote by Dietram A. Scheufele, professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and at the Morgridge Institute for Research. Scheufele emphasized the current challenges of communication and media research, including open science and computational studies, with the latter focusing, so far, on accessible data rather than on the most relevant channels. The report concludes with a "hats off" to the conference organizers.

The last words in this editorial are in memory of Dr. Jost Aregger, who died this year. A beautiful obituary is given by Bettina Nyffeler, with whom he worked at the Federal Office of Communications (OFCOM). Bettina Nyffeler describes the academic and professional career, personal path, and inspiring mind of the man who was

also a very active and highly esteemed member of the SACM board of administration.

We hope you will enjoy reading this issue.

Silke Fürst and Sébastien Salerno